

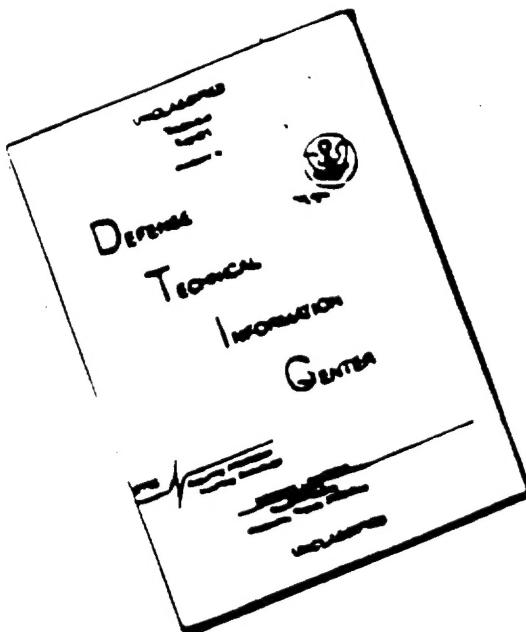


# SOF VISION 2020

U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND  
Report of the Joint Chiefs of Staff  
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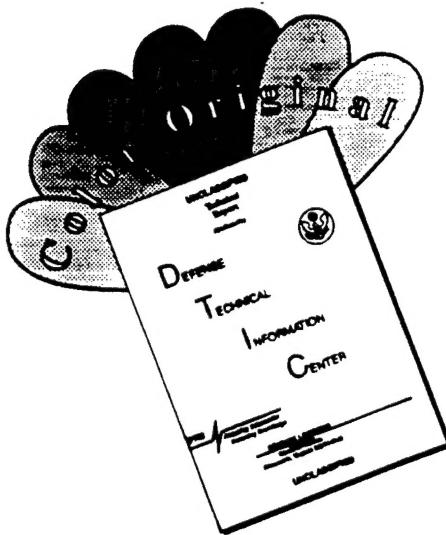
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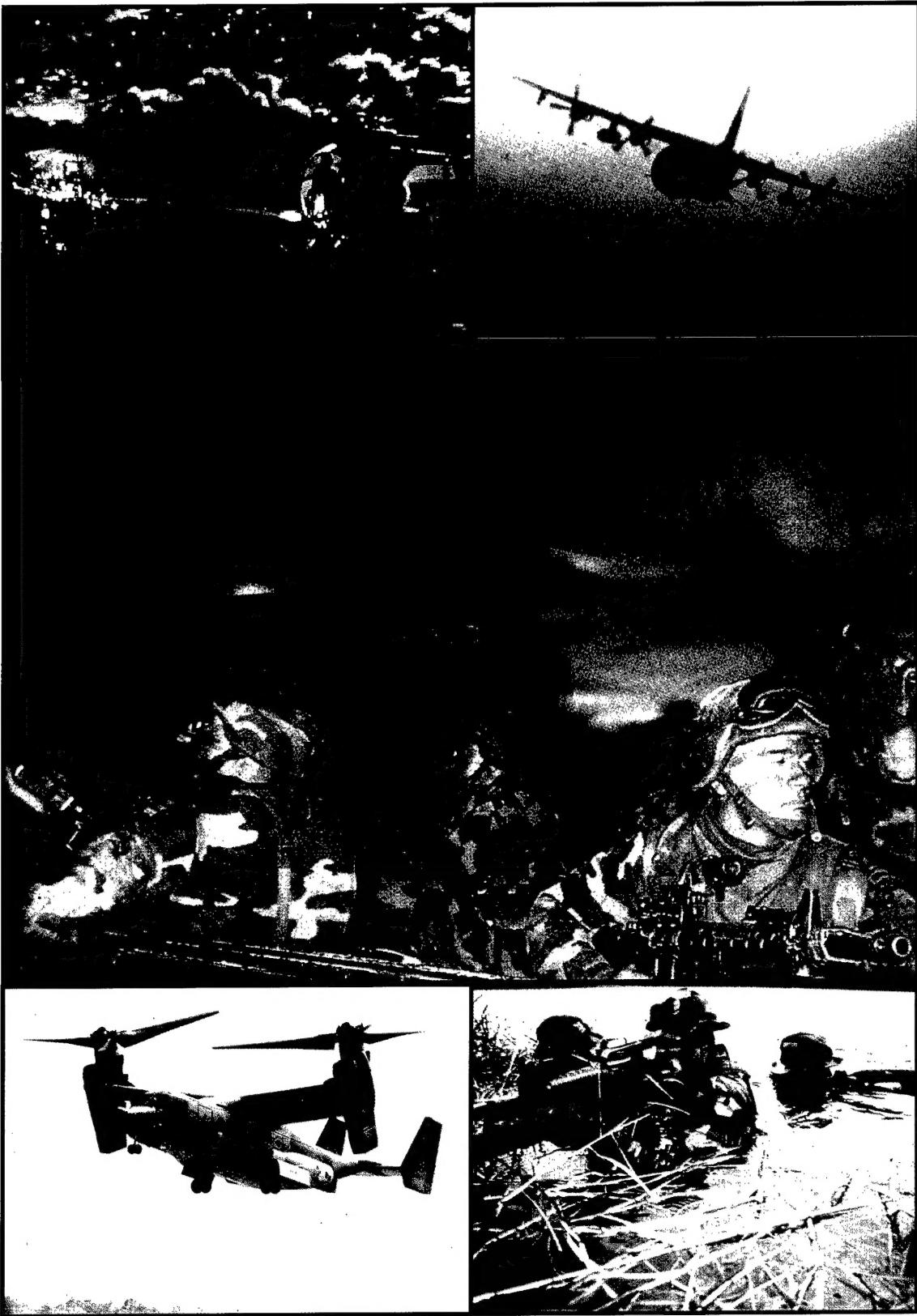


## **CINC'S VISION**

**Tomorrow's Special Operations Forces - building on today's successes with:**

- Quality people who are experienced self-reliant warrior-diplomats**
- Versatile and responsive units that are regionally and culturally oriented**
- Specialized state-of-the-art equipment**

**Operating in a volatile and uncertain world wide, providing unique capabilities across the continuum of conflict.**



# FOREWORD

Radical changes are taking place which will have dramatic affects on how special operations forces (SOF) operate in the future. Emerging international entities and forces have replaced the status quo. Rapidly changing elements, both internal and external, have forced old governments to fall and new governments to rise creating new challenges. International lawlessness threatens the stability of current and future democratic and non-democratic governments throughout the world. Technological advances increase the likelihood that unprincipled elements or states will develop and threaten the use of weapons of mass destruction. The common denominator for the future political, economic, and social environment is "uncertainty."

Economic, demographic, environmental, informational, and technological developments are evolving at an accelerated pace, leading to new challenges. In order to face these challenges head-on, United States Special Operations Command has developed a long-range strategy that embraces the future.

**SOF VISION 2020** is our link to the National Military Strategy and Joint Vision 2010. It provides a long-range strategy for SOF missions, force structure, equipment, and capabilities into and beyond 2020.

As the United States moves into the 21st century, SOF will prepare for the world's uncertain future while operating in an ever-dynamic present. We will actively pursue new and innovative ways to increase the effectiveness of SOF, in peace and war. By providing world class training and state-of-the-art equipment to our most valuable asset, our people, we will prepare the force for the volatile, multi-polar world of the future.

Fully cognizant of the crucial role special operations will play in executing national strategy, we will emphasize flexibility and adaptability while confronting future challenges. We will provide a relevant, highly trained force of "Quiet Professionals" with unique capabilities to offer our nation.



H. ALLEN HOLMES

Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special  
Operations and Low Intensity Conflict



HENRY H. SHELTON

General, U.S. Army  
Commander in Chief  
United States Special Operations Command

# INTRODUCTION

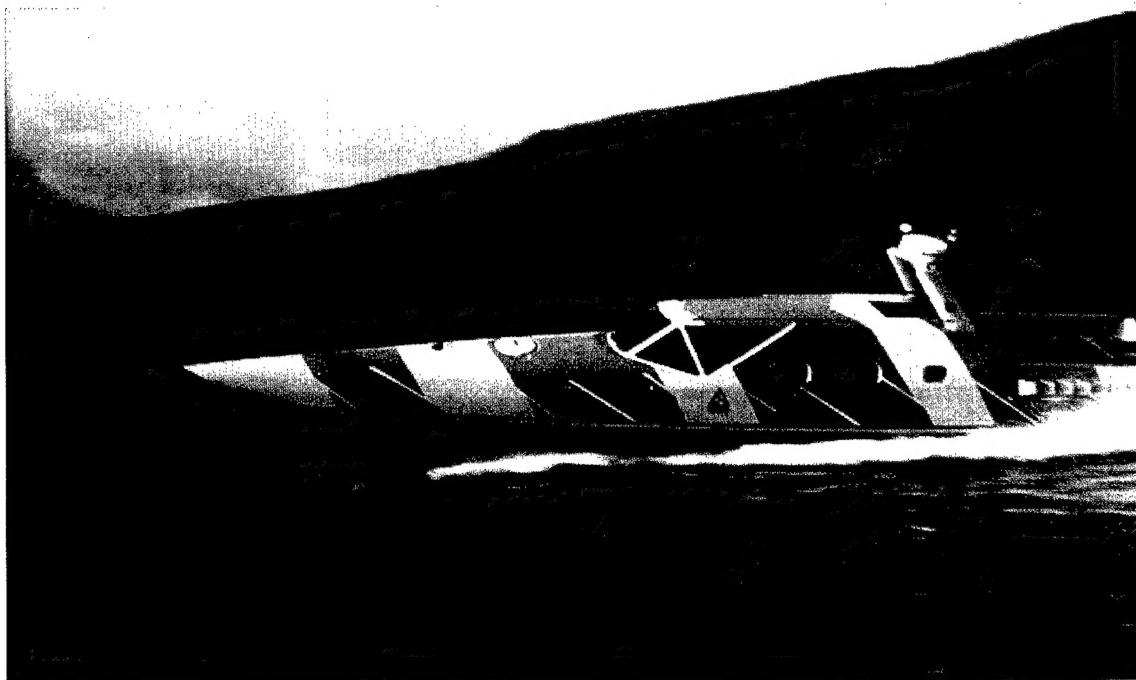
*SOF VISION 2020* is the United States Special Operations Command's (USSOCOM) framework for building and maintaining the necessary operational capabilities of future special operations forces (SOF). This vision incorporates our **two most fundamental strengths--quality people with unequaled skills and a broad-based technological edge** --to ensure tomorrow's SOF are structured, trained, and equipped to counter diverse threats to our national security. *SOF VISION 2020* builds upon Joint Vision (JV) 2010 concepts as they apply to SOF, while complementing Service roadmaps for the future to optimize the synergism between SOF and conventional forces. Lastly, constrained resources will continue to demand improved levels of effectiveness and efficiency.

Our current National Military Strategy (NMS) is comprised of three components--peacetime engagement, deterrence and conflict prevention, and fight and win--all of which convey implications for SOF. Moreover, the increasing influence of non-traditional actors and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) introduce a new threat--one having potentially catastrophic impact. This threat requires unique skills, tactics, systems, and training to counter successfully. *SOF VISION 2020* anticipates the emergence of this new threat which implies *crisis resolution* as an emerging component of future U.S. military strategy.

*SOF VISION 2020* is underpinned by a rigorous assessment of the future geo-political landscape and attendant threats. From this analysis, we can extrapolate several key defining characteristics of SOF in the next

century. **We will provide military capabilities not available elsewhere in the armed forces.** For example, information warfare and counterproliferation will require that we lead in technology exploitation. In other cases, such as civil affairs, this will require fielded capabilities which take years to develop and refine. We will establish military-to-military and civilian contacts in potential areas of interest, principally through foreign internal defense missions. We will be ready and deployable so that we can be the very first to arrive, integrate, and operate. We will be well-suited to achieve local dominance--combat, mobility, and information--to accomplish national objectives. SOF will be regionally oriented--culturally, linguistically, and politically--while remaining a rapidly deployable, agile, joint force with capabilities ranging from humanitarian assistance to precision surgical strikes.

To prepare SOF properly and ensure relevancy to future threats, *SOF VISION 2020* outlines three parallel paths--professional development, technological innovation, and proactive acquisition. The heritage, profession-

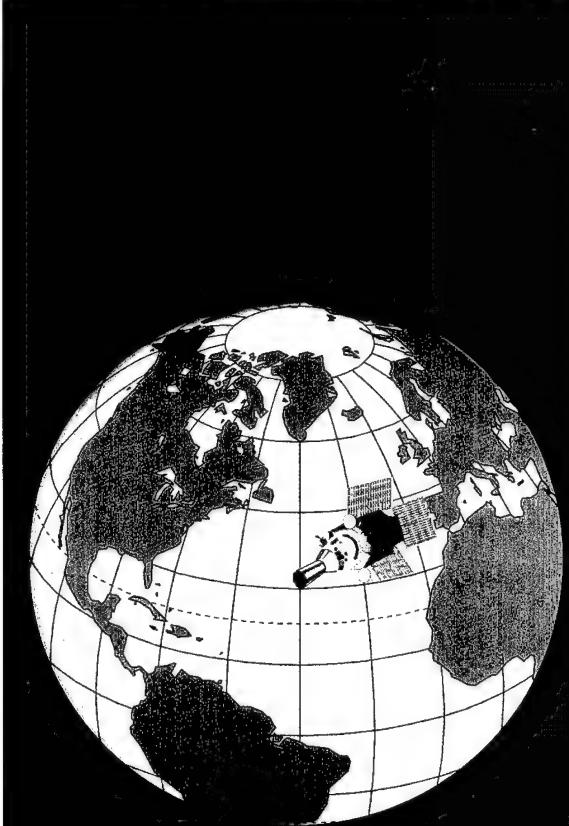


alism, and common goals shared by SOF today provide the catalyst for *SOF VISION 2020*. Implementation of *SOF VISION 2020* relies on enlightened leadership and inspired management of SOF personnel and equipment to ensure preeminence across the entire spectrum of operations.

As our nation faces myriad threats in 2020, SOF will already be there. SOF's role in peacetime engagement will continue to give this nation a standing presence in areas of national interest. When threats escalate, SOF will deter, defend, or enable follow-on forces to halt aggression. During crises, our rapid mobility and surgical strike capabilities will make SOF the logical force of choice in *crisis response*. In short, SOF's forward presence and engagement posture define us as the world's premier SOF--***already there or first to deploy***.



# THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT



The year is 2020.

Though the international environment will still be dominated by state-to-state relations, non-state actors such as terrorists, transnational organizations, criminal organizations, narco-traffickers, and multi-national corporations will play an increased role in world politics. Although a peer military competitor will not exist, alliances will emerge which pose military, economic and technological challenges to the United States' vital interests.

The complexion of the future global strategic environment will be characterized by a broad range of traditional and non-traditional actors. Although they may not pose a strategic threat to the U.S., many can seriously threaten U.S. interests in a

limited time and place. International borders will become increasingly porous, with people, money, technology, and information transiting the globe at a rapid pace. The increasing reliance upon information systems will provide tempting avenues of attack for insurgents, terrorists, and other potential adversaries. The proliferation of WMD, particularly biological and chemical agents, may make them the weapons of choice for developing nations or unprincipled elements. Even if never used, WMD are a status symbol among states and non-state actors which enhance their security, confer international prestige, and complicate our planning. In addition, WMD upset regional balances and allow the holder to intimidate neighbors and force the "have nots" to seek the same capability. Therefore, we must be able to **find, track, and neutralize an adversary's WMD capability.**

Changing regional trends will also create a wide range of threats. On the one hand, emerging regional states with expanding populations and strong economies may be tempted to exercise power in ways that threaten U.S. or allied interests. On the other hand, regional instability and failed states make it more difficult to control transnational threats to our security. These threats will include the proliferation of WMD, subversion, terrorism, global environmental degradation, illegal drugs, information-based warfare, and other challenges to international stability and prosperity.

Non-state actors with access to technology will emerge, giving them advantage over other regional actors. Terrorists, criminal groups, and multinational entities will seek to influence world events by threatening to employ unconventional methods or weapons that give them a disproportionate leverage to achieve their goals.

Advances in technology will enable new forms of warfare. Although many of these—notably information warfare—will be non-lethal, SOF must adapt to emerging technologies and threats to maintain full spectrum dom-

inance. SOF must be prepared to counter or respond, at times asymmetrically, to both traditional and non-traditional forms of conflict. To achieve this, we must be organizationally innovative. We must continually scrutinize our organizations and missions, divesting or adding missions and redesigning the basic fabric of our units when necessary. This evolution must preserve our flexibility to respond with creative means to achieve our nation's objectives. At all times, we must find ways to maximize the efficiency of our people in a future of expanding SOF operations.

The United States generally prefers to use multi-national and coalition means to respond to events that impinge on our national interests. There will be times, however, when the U.S. must operate unilaterally to resolve a crisis. Yet, unilateral action places time and

readiness demands on mobilizing and deploying forces to crisis locations to ensure a proactive response. Therefore, unilateral action requires that **SOF maintain regional orientation, cultural adaptation, language skills and forward presence** to ensure political, economic, and physical access to potential crisis locations. The key will be for SOF to focus on those core capabilities required to execute our mission in a resource-constrained environment. We must also design and field these core competencies so they can be employed with ease in an interagency, joint, and combined operating environment. This connectivity will ensure that we do not permit a gap in important overseas presence requirements being divested by other governmental agencies.



## **ADVANCING AMERICA'S NATIONAL INTEREST**

Our Constitution is the foundation which defines our national interests. In the past, our nation was able to "provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our posterity" within the confines of our own borders. Presently, and more so in the future, the means to achieve our national interests lie outside our geographical borders. Our national security increasingly depends on promoting free trade, market

economies, and equitable international trade laws designed to increase global prosperity.

The National Security Strategy outlines America's three central goals: to enhance our security with military

forces that are ready to fight and win, to bolster America's economic revitalization, and to promote democracy abroad. To achieve these goals, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff formulated the National Military Strategy of flexible and selective engagement, carefully selecting the means and level of our participation in military operations.

SOF is especially well suited for peacetime engagement with regionally and culturally oriented forces. Nation assistance, security assistance, humanitarian operations, counterdrug, counterterrorism, and counterproliferation are

hallmarks of SOF peacetime capabilities.

America contributes to world security and stability by countering the drug threat, combatting terrorism, and countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Sustained high readiness levels and

prolonged engagement in nearly all areas of the world place SOF in an ideal position to detect trouble as it develops and to deter or prevent conflict.

SOF can work either unilaterally or as part of a joint team to lay the groundwork for conventional forces.

Ultimately, the purpose of America's military is to fight and win the nation's wars. SOF play a critical role in supporting the geographic CINCs in their peacetime strategies and theater war plans. SOF are

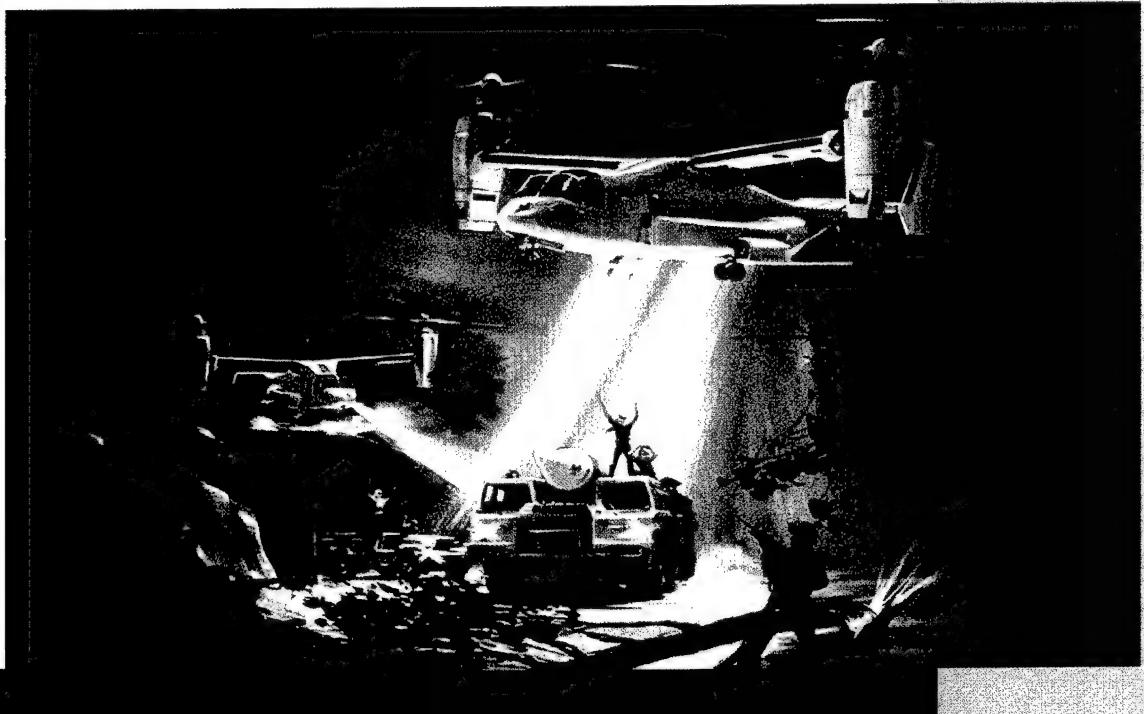
highly effective in our engagement and deter/defend roles and also serve as a crucial precursor and combat force multiplier to large-scale conventional operations.



## **BUILDING TOWARD DOD'S FUTURE**

The Chairman's JV 2010 is the conceptual template of how America's armed forces will channel the vitality and innovation of our people and leverage technology opportunities to achieve new levels of effectiveness in joint warfighting.

This vision of future warfighting embodies improved intelligence as well as command and control ascendancy in the information age. The crux of *JV 2010* is its four operational concepts of dominant maneuver, precision engagement, full-dimensional protection, and focused logistics—all of which are enabled by information superiority. These concepts are tied to conventional forces as well as how SOF support conventional forces. Dominant maneuver will be the multidimensional application of information, engagement, and mobility capabilities. Precision engagement con-



sists of a system of systems that enable our forces to locate the objective or target, provide responsive command and control, and generate the desired effect. Full-dimensional protection will be control of the battlespace to ensure our forces can maintain freedom of action during deployment.

maneuver, and engagement. Focused logistics will enhance the capability to respond rapidly to crises.

The nation's security needs will continue to demand major ground, air, and sea maneuver forces to do the heavy fighting in a major regional contingency and fill follow-on roles in lesser regional contingencies as readiness and lift permit. Future forces must possess the capability to execute tasks with enhanced lethality, greater stealth and precision with minimal risk to the individual. However, the peace-time engagement and deterrence/conflict prevention missions will require a light, mobile, and flexible force in those cases where large conventional units take longer to deploy and may require additional training to do the job.

## BUILDING TOWARD THE SOF FUTURE

*JV 2010* outlines the Chairman's future joint developmental efforts and, in conjunction with the National Military Strategy, provides front-end guidance for defense efforts to achieve future joint warfighting capabilities. *SOF VISION 2020* captures the concepts of *JV 2010* and carries them forward to integrate SOF activities and capabilities with the Services and their larger conventional forces. Furthermore, *SOF VISION 2020* indicates where **we**

**must sustain or develop capabilities to complement those of the Services and other agencies.** A faster and better educated force must be provided to enhance conventional capabilities. Finally, we must provide unique capabilities, expertise, and continuity which does not exist elsewhere.

SOF will continue to play fundamental, critical roles in each of the three strategic components (peacetime engagement, deterrence and conflict prevention, and fight and win) of today's National Military Strategy. Beyond today's needs, however, the broad array and availability of WMD threats postulated for 2020 and the break down of traditional nation-states, coupled with the emergence of non-state actors, indicate a future military strategy that includes a fourth component, crisis resolution. Crisis resolution is the ability to respond quickly to and successfully neutralize a no-notice, often lethal threat, demanding unique skills and the rapid response capability inherent in SOF.



## Defining Characteristics

Examination of the strategic landscape, possible threats, technological trends, and future roles and missions identifies SOF's defining characteristics:



- Sized/trained/equipped to engage across the technological and operational continuums
- Regionally focused: culturally/linguistically/politically
- Rapidly deployable/surgical strike capable/able to achieve combat, mobility, and information dominance on a limited scale
- Flexible/agile joint forces which can develop and execute unconventional, audacious, high pay-off courses of action

The world environment in 2020 will require an agile military force sized, trained and equipped to defeat quickly and successfully numerous threats across the spectrum of conflict. In addition to military competence and regional knowledge, an appreciation of historical, political, cultural, and socio-economic realities will be more essential in 2020 as the U.S. reduces its permanent military and diplomatic presence in parts of the world. In numerous cases, small unobtrusive elements can be used as a low-key deterrence or a lead-in for larger scale forces. SOF's mobility capabilities will be the linchpin of future operations as we seek to influence

events in areas of the world critical to U.S. interests.

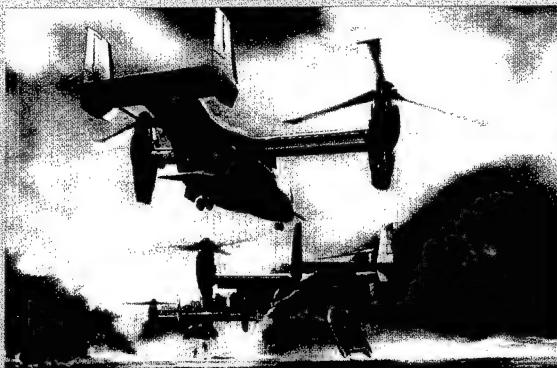
America requires forces who are at home in all parts of the peace/war continuum. Prepared with specialized skills not available in the military at large, SOF can succeed in limited objectives throughout all spheres of operations—combat, mobility, and information.



### **Strong Role in Peacetime Engagement**

SOF must continue to play a strong role in peacetime engagement, enabling the U.S. to maintain an overseas presence with self-reliant operators attuned to local conditions. SOF will often be the first to engage with their language skills and cultural expertise, providing credible and favorable first impressions of America's armed

forces while acquiring situational awareness in regions of U.S. interests. Close contact in military-to-military settings or contact with local populace will enhance respect, establish or improve relations, reduce tensions, and facilitate coalition building. Continued emphasis on joint and interagency interoperability is paramount. SOF peacetime engagement in 2020 will provide a low-key presence, politically acceptable and readily convertible to military applications.



### **Larger Deter/Defend Role**

In 2020, the SOF warrior-diplomat will influence, advise, train, and interact with foreign forces and populations. This influence will act as a deterrent to potential adversaries by establishing a legitimate presence with host governments. Should conflict become imminent, the U.S. must be ready to transition to a "fight and win" pos-

ture and respond with speed, surprise, shock, and agility to gain the

## Crisis Resolution



initiative. All aspects of *JV 2010* apply to SOF in this growing force application, as we must be able to dominate a limited time and space faster and smarter than any potential adversary. Not only must we be able to focus combat power, information superiority, and logistics at the point of attack, but do so with precision and speed that minimize friendly casualties, collateral damage, and the enemy's ability to react.

The SOF contribution to crisis resolution, crisis response, enables America to act on warning to employ low-key, politico-military, or unconventional force applications to defuse a conflict before it

occurs or escalates. Potential crises will run the gamut from humanitarian tragedies to armed conflict. SOF must be able to deploy immediately and discreetly to flashpoints in adequate time to organize coalition efforts for relief or conflict. U.S. success in the crises of 2020 will largely hinge on small, mature, and when necessary, lethal forces to assist those in need, to stabilize flashpoints, or to pursue aggressors. SOF's role does not compete with conventional forces, but offers

the National Command Authorities and combatant commanders capabilities

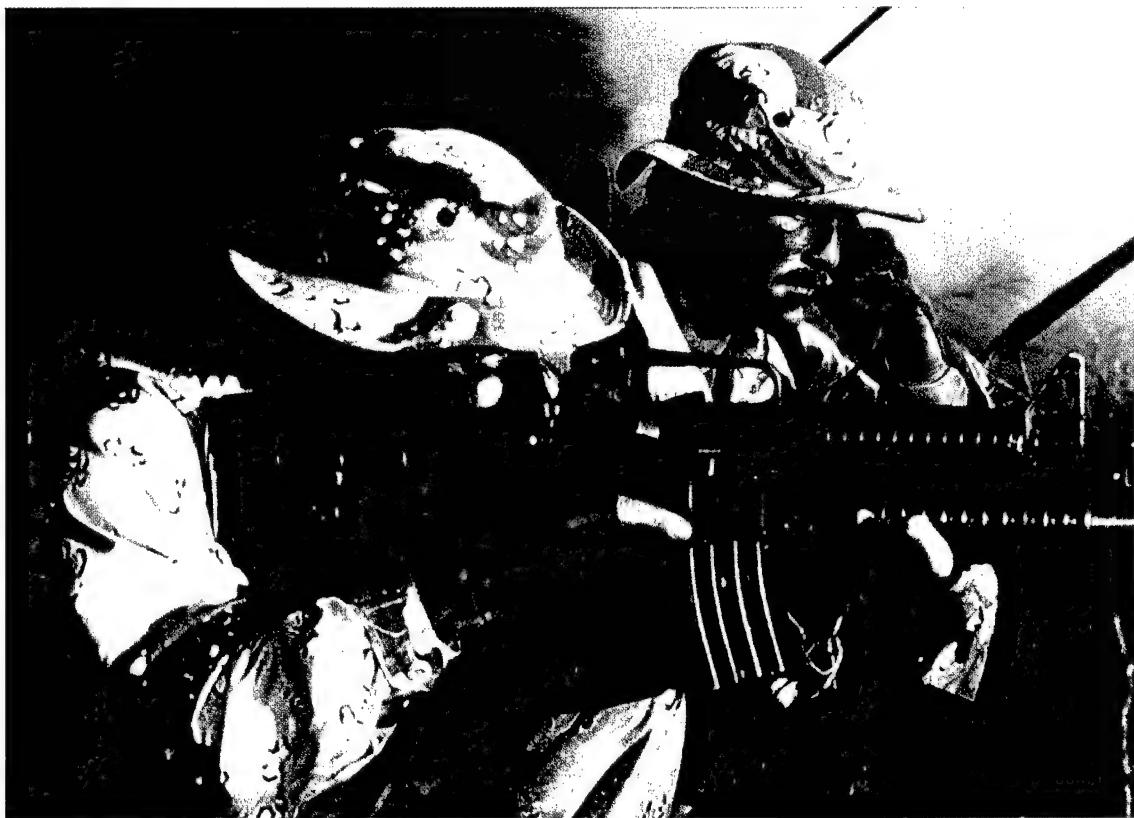


ties that are not resident in the conventional force structure. SOF will give the geographic CINC established connections in any potential crisis area and provide those unique capabilities that quickly and decisively neutralize the threat. Future SOF crisis response capabilities will give life to innovative, unconventional, high pay-off alternatives where no other viable option exists.

### Force Multiplier

In regional crises, SOF will enable the geographic CINC to choose from a wide range of options to extend his strategic reach. SOF will serve as a force multiplier for conventional forces and country teams by providing a joint agile force able to rapidly integrate with other forces. SOF will conduct direct actions against enemy forces' centers of gravity to reduce the enemy's ability to sustain coherent combat operations. Counter-proliferation operations

can counter WMD threats before they are brought to bear on the battlefield. Special reconnaissance in otherwise denied areas will provide the commander the information he needs to seize the initiative. Foreign internal defense will provide the vital culturally-attuned link to coalition forces. Unconventional warfare will limit the enemy's freedom of action by introducing an indigenous force-multiplier behind his lines. Civil affairs will consolidate gains, enable early withdrawal of friendly forces, and lay the foundation for the resumption of lawful affairs. Psychological operations shape the battlefield, defeat the enemy's will and give the commander alternatives more consistent with our national objectives. Information operations will corrupt the enemy's picture of our strengths and vulnerabilities. To remain relevant, our core and emerging tasks must transcend traditional force-on-force applications of conventional forces or give the commander capabilities not otherwise available in conventional forces.





## **Instruments of Success Quality People**

People are the key to our future success. Lifelong military learning experience must train for certainty but educate for uncertainty. We must maintain our traditional emphasis on high-quality, rigorous training and reinforce it with effective education that encourages creative, thoughtful solutions to sensitive and high-risk situations.

The recruiting process, called assessment and selection, is a mix of art and science. The current and projected manpower and resource pool will not permit business as usual. Recruiting practices must enable us to

keep pace with emerging needs for mission skills. The manpower pool from which we must recruit--both within our parent Services and the population pool at large--is projected to shrink. Nevertheless, we must continue to recruit and retain smarter soldiers, sailors, and airmen. Finding enough self-reliant people with physical and mental strength, endurance, and stability under extreme stress will pose an immense challenge which we must address now.

We will review recruitment pools and accession practices, finding people who already have certain aptitudes and skills, rather than having to train them. We must also improve our assessment tools to understand what personal characteristics most likely result in a reliable SOF warrior. We must then have a plan to ascertain what skills will be resident in our recruiting pool and what skills we must be prepared to develop with SOF resources.



## Training and Education

Future training programs must link to operational plans, integrate advanced technologies, capture the savings of simulations, and respond to evolving missions. Linking SOF training to operational plans, to the maxi-

mum extent possible, is consistent with our regional and cultural orientation, training as we will fight, and reducing personnel tempo. SOF will exploit advanced individual computer-aided instruction, realistic interactive distributed simulations, and virtual reality environments to prepare units. The learning process must be accelerated to shorten the



reserve SOF train-up time and improve retention of key knowledge. Technology will allow SOF to provide effective training and education directly to our personnel at work or while deployed. Easily modified, stressful simulations will prepare our people for the full spectrum of SOF missions. Virtual reali-

ty will assist in the training process by offering an effective way to train in a high-fidelity, safe environment. A comprehensive, career-long commitment to training and education will be required for successful future SOF operations.

Our language base must also be responsive to the changing global environment and be enhanced by advanced training techniques and technologies. As the conventional force presence throughout the world is reduced, we anticipate the number of countries in which SOF will operate to increase. As a result, we will adjust the language base.

## **Professional Development**

The SOF community must prepare our people to remain professionally competitive by developing a comprehensive personal, team, and leadership development

program. Requirements to serve excessively outside SOF to retain service or professional viability may reduce numbers of experienced personnel and cut into SOF's day-to-day mission capability. Nevertheless, we must achieve a balance between generalist and specialist skills in our

Service and professional resources within a structured, phased approach to personnel development. SOF professional development initiatives will complement Service programs such as officer and enlisted professional military education while offering other opportunities and experiences at the right time in a career. A key positive by-product of this professional development program will

be the increased opportunity to place the SOF perspective into forums throughout DOD where key leaders make decisions about SOF and employment of SOF. We must prepare SOF officers and enlisted personnel for positions



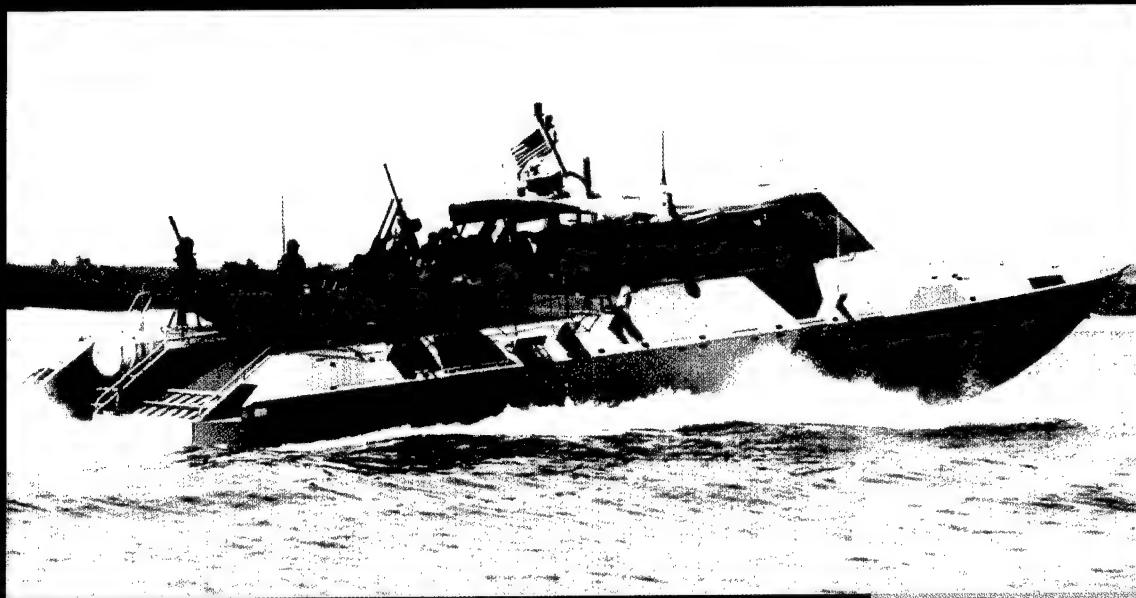
force. Long-term retention of SOF personnel requires that SOF remain competitive for promotion in their Services. This requirement, coupled with the demands of world-wide SOF deployments, creates a tremendous "career management" challenge for the force personnel managers. We must use available

of increased responsibility by keeping them professionally viable in their respective Services and professions.

## Technology

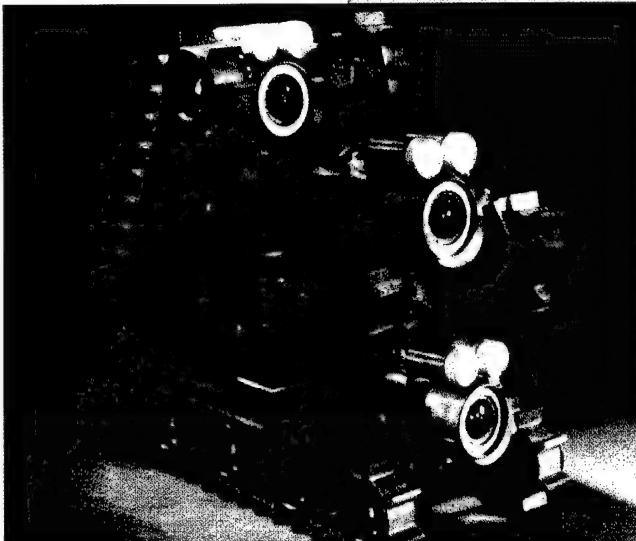
We will look to emerging, leading-edge technologies in such areas as mobility, sensing and identification, miniaturization, secure

communications, advanced munitions, stealth, human enhancements, and robotics to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of our people and platforms. We will continue to identify and pursue key technologies that have the potential to satisfy future SOF requirements, maintain our core competencies, and meet emerging SOF missions. We will continue to be a test bed for new technologies. We will expand our initiative to leverage relevant technology projects within the Department of Defense agencies, Services, national laboratories, and industry. We will develop closer working relationships with key organizations that will be driving technologies most relevant to SOF interests.



## Acquisition

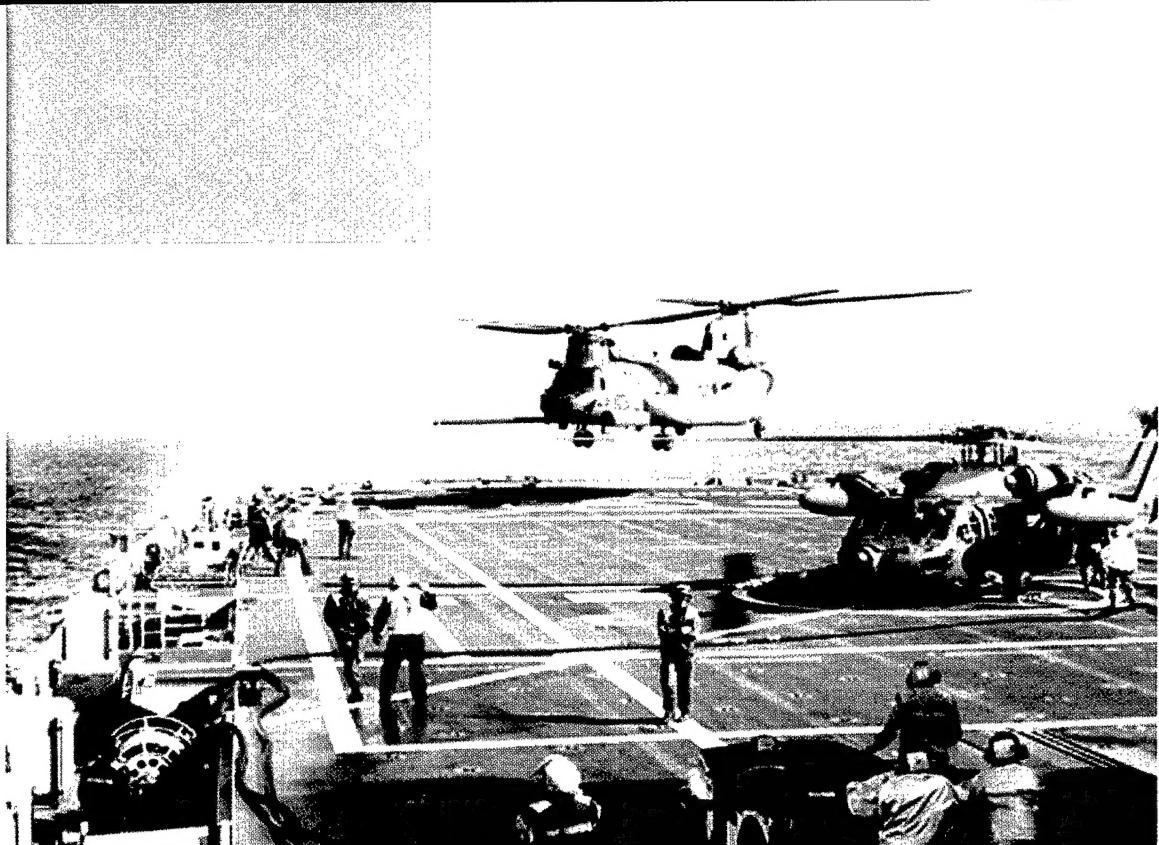
Our future acquisition process will acquire systems which provide the best capability for effecting SOF missions based on performance and lifecycle cost. This concept implies that we select a balance of systems based on SOF requirements. Our acquisition strategy will embrace cost as an independent variable. This strategy



will ensure the user remains involved in the tradeoffs between capability and cost during the entire acquisition process.

As we look at developmental versus off-the-shelf acquisitions, we will critically weigh developing a new system, and its expected performance increase against the relative ease of fielding a proven commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) system. When state-of-the-art performance is essential, we will undertake development and acquisition of new systems. We will acquire a number of other systems by integrating existing COTS components or subsystems in new ways to provide capabilities unique to SOF. Given the increasing availability of sophisticated COTS technology, we must assume our adversaries will possess many of the most dangerous COTS capabilities. For this reason, we must be better and faster at integrating new technologies to gain the advantage that we seek. We will use COTS equipment when feasible and pursue development when we must.

An overarching challenge for the future is a responsive logistics system that is affordable, sustainable, and fully interoperable with the Services. We will achieve success by introducing logistics supportability early in the acquisition process and ensuring the alignment with Service policy on logistic infrastructure. The future will bring a streamlined acquisition process, and SOF will lead in implementation.



## Implementation

Vision is useful only so long as it can be translated into effective decisions, for it is today's decisions which shape tomorrow's environment. *SOF VISION 2020* is the umbrella under which all other activities must align. Our four core processes of strategic planning, resourcing, acquisition, and operations and training must be integrated through the broad concepts addressed in *SOF VISION 2020*. As the Strategic Planning Process considers SOF needs beyond the early years of the millennium, *SOF VISION 2020* will provide the guidance for future strategies. The processes of resourcing and acquiring force structure and equipment for our needs in 2020 naturally dovetails into strategic planning. Lastly, operations and training is our day-to-day check on Command direction, providing the necessary feedback to ensure consistency. *SOF VISION 2020* is my future vision for today's decisions.

## CONCLUSION

In the year 2020, SOF will fulfill our unique global responsibilities from peacetime engagement to fight and win. In a world of increased global interaction, SOF will be a unique mechanism for extending U.S. influence, ideals, and values. Faced with an increasingly volatile world and diminishing resources, SOF will provide access and promote stability with an affordable, yet effective, force for implementing U.S. national strategies. When American interests are faced with unpredictable threats, SOF will provide flexible and precise, lethal and non-lethal options to the NCA. We will provide core competencies not available anywhere else in the military. We will preserve the environment and the people who enable us to devise and execute innovative solutions to crises in an uncertain world.

The characteristics of future SOF will build upon its strengths of today--highly motivated and trained people, employing state-of-the art technology, operating as a joint and cohesive force to provide unique and bold courses of action to the NCA. The demand for SOF will continue to grow. In the year 2020, we will continue to be the world's premier special operations force--**already there or first to deploy**--in a volatile and uncertain world.



